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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: UNHCR HOLDS SEMINAR ON STATELESSNESS IN TURKMENISTAN

¶1. (U) Sensitive but Unclassified. Not for Internet distribution

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: At a February 6 seminar for Government officials on the improvement of legislation on statelessness, a UNHCR expert explained the international legal framework of citizenship rights and prevention of statelessness. He also discussed the causes of statelessness and protection of stateless persons. According to a Turkmen Government official, in 2012 Turkmenistan will conduct a national census with the assistance of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Representative noted that the Turkmen Government had invited UNHCR to review the country's legislation. As such, the seminar was held in the framework of legal reform in Turkmenistan aimed at bringing the country's legislation in line with international standards. END SUMMARY.

UNHCR INVITED TO REVIEW LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

¶3. (SBU) The director of the State Institute for Democracy and Human Rights (IDHR), Shirin Ahmedova, opened the session, saying that the seminar was held in the framework of legal reform for further democratization of Turkmen society and improvement of national legislation. In this regard, Ahmedova underscored that Turkmenistan pays significant importance to learning from international experience and strengthening contacts with foreign partners, especially with UN agencies. The UNHCR Representative to Turkmenistan, Brita Helleland, noted that the Government of Turkmenistan had invited UNHCR to review the legislative process and that UNHCR would support the process by rendering its assistance. The seminar on statelessness was one such event organized by UNHCR together with the Turkmen Government.

¶4. (SBU) Mark Manly, the Head of the Statelessness Unit at UNHCR Headquarters, delivered a presentation on statelessness. In particular, he talked about the international legal framework for citizenship rights and the prevention of statelessness. He also addressed the UNHCR's mandate in this area, the causes and detection of statelessness, and the protection of stateless persons. His presentation was followed by a Q&A session as well as discussion of UN Conventions and Turkmen laws governing citizenship and statelessness.

NATIONAL CENSUS SCHEDULED FOR 2012

¶ 15. (SBU) In the course of the seminar, Ahmedova mentioned that in 2005, former President Niyazov issued two acts to eliminate cases of statelessness, according to which more than 3,000 stateless persons received residence permits and over 13,000 refugees received Turkmenistan citizenship. She underscored that this government action was an example of Turkmenistan's commitment to principles of peacefulness and humanism. She also reminded the audience that in 2012 Turkmenistan would conduct a national census with the assistance of UNDP in order to learn how many people reside in Turkmenistan.

¶ 16. (SBU) The event gathered representatives from IDHR, Institute for State and Law under President of Turkmenistan, Mejlis (Parliament) of Turkmenistan, Ministries of Justice, Internal Affairs, Social Welfare, Education, Healthcare, State Customs, Migration, and Border Services, General Prosecutor's Office, Bar Association, Police and Military Academies, professors and students of Turkmen State University, Institute of International Affairs of MFA, local media, U.S. Embassy, Russian Embassy and UNHCR Mission in Turkmenistan.

¶ 17. (SBU) COMMENT: The workshop was yet another indication of the Turkmenistan Government's willingness to work with UN organizations. Substantively, it followed the familiar format of a subject matter expert(s) meeting with Government officials to present information about international standards and to field questions. It remains to be seen in the final Turkmen legislative product to what extent the principles underlying international practices were grasped by the participants and incorporated. END COMMENT.

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